



ROBERT
HENDERSON

FOREWORD BY MARK CHIRONNA

OPERATING IN THE
POWER
OF
GOD'S
GRACE

DISCOVER THE SECRET OF FRUITFULNESS

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Without Mary, my wife of over forty years, I would have less of a view and understanding of the grace of God. She is my encourager, my counselor and one who brings necessary prophetic insight into my life at significant and pivotal times. In short, she is an expression of God's grace toward me. I dedicate this book to her. I am so grateful for her undying faithfulness, loyalty and love to me and to our family. Thanks, sweetie, for being God's grace personified.

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Foreword

Perhaps the most significant existential crisis of our times is tied to the question of “Who am I?” Identity crisis has always been an issue, yet in the consumer-driven post-Christian culture in which we find ourselves, we are attempting to know ourselves as individuals who are self-conscious rather than as persons made in the image and likeness of God.

When God created Adam, He declared, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Famed twentieth-century English anthropologist Gregory Bateson said, “It takes two to know one.” In essence, Bateson was echoing God’s evaluation that it isn’t good for any of us to be individuals. We cannot know ourselves by ourselves. The moment we attempt to define ourselves independent of the triune God, we deny ourselves the grace of knowing who we truly are. And when we fail to know who we truly are based on who God made us to be, we fail to avail ourselves of the grace of God by the Holy Spirit to become all He intends us to be.

The Holy Spirit influences us from the depths to bring us to full awareness of who we are, where we are going and how we will arrive there. That influence of the Spirit involves His uncreated energy, which is constantly moving toward us and in us to empower us to fulfill all His intent. What the Scriptures call that activity of the Spirit is “grace”—a topic often overlooked and often misinterpreted. Grace is immensely powerful and essential to the perfecting experiences and totality of our expression in life, which flows out of an awareness of our God-given uniqueness as persons. Learning to lean on the indwelling Spirit to be all we are called to be and to become all we are called to become is the fruit of this amazing grace.

Robert Henderson is a great communicator, and he has some compelling insights on the grace of God. He makes that grace accessible to us at the practical place in life of how to put one foot in front of another by the Spirit, and then to take the next easiest step of faith by grace into our God-intended future. *Operating in the Power of God's Grace* is worth the read and, more than that, worth heeding and applying. Enjoy the read, and make the most of it by acting on what you have read.

Dr. Mark Chironna, Church On The Living Edge,
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ONE

Freed to Be Fruitful

There is a cry in every believer to be fruitful. It is inbred in us. We want our lives to matter and to count. We want to feel as though we are accomplishing something worthwhile. I know there will be the detractors who say that our identity is not based in what we do, but in who we are. They will point out that we must not live life from a performance perspective, feeling good about ourselves based on how well we perform, rather than on who God says we are. I would absolutely agree with this. From having the right idea about who we are, however, we are to produce an impact and make a difference with our lives. We are to be fulfilling our God-ordained reason for being alive on the planet. The Bible actually teaches that each one of us has a divine reason for being here. The apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:10 that things were planned beforehand for us: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

We were created for good works. This is why we crave being effective. It is built into us. It is part of the divine nature we have received from God. Doing good works does not just imply living morally sound lives. Good works are about fulfilling those things that God prepared *beforehand*, which we are to walk in. This all flows out of our being His *workmanship*, which is the Greek word *poiema*. It means “a product,” or a “thing that is made.”* From *poiema* we get our word *poem*, so it is a creative work. When we look at art, read poetry or enjoy some kind of artistic piece, what we are looking at actually reveals the artist who created it. The nature of the artist is hidden within the artistic display. So it is within us. As those who belong to Jesus and are born again, the nature of the Artist is revealed in us and through us. Who He is, is seen from our lives. This is seen in the *good works* flowing out of us as His *workmanship*.

I think it is interesting that this verse in Ephesians speaks of us having been *created* in Christ Jesus for these good works. *Created* is in the past tense. This means that before we existed, this was already done. What we are here to accomplish was preordained for us. We did not enter the earth without reason or purpose. The day we were born, we entered the earth with a divine and heavenly agenda. There were already plans of God that we were to fulfill. This requires fruitfulness.

Standing above the Crowd

In some circles, having a desire for success and accomplishment is looked down on. For instance, in the Australian cul-

*Note that the definitions I provide of Greek and Hebrew words throughout are all taken from *Strong's Concordance*, Orion Systems Version 3.0.3 (2010–2017), <https://itunes.apple.com/dm/app/strong-s-concordance/id405005619?mt=8>.

ture (which I love, by the way), there is something referred to as the “tall poppy syndrome.” Poppies are beautiful flowers, yet this phrase is used in a degrading way to describe anyone who wants to stand out above others. It is okay if you are beautiful and blend in with others. If, however, you try to stand above the crowd in any kind of way, you are accused of having this tall poppy syndrome. This accusation is used to make everyone blend in so that no one person is above any other. As my Australian friends tell me, this is healthy in one sense, in that it creates humility. In another sense, however, it destroys creativity and uniqueness and thwarts people’s desire to have a big impact. If they try to stand out and be significant, they are put back in their place.

This kind of syndrome is not just relegated to the Australian culture. It also appears in other cultures, families and settings. In some religious circles, the desire to rise and shine is ridiculed and looked down on. David found himself fighting against this attitude, when all he was trying to do was be faithful to what was inside him. First Samuel 17:26–29 tells us the story of David’s brothers ridiculing him because he dared to stand up:

Then David spoke to the men who stood by him, saying, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

And the people answered him in this manner, saying, “So shall it be done for the man who kills him.”

Now Eliab his oldest brother heard when he spoke to the men; and Eliab’s anger was aroused against David, and he said, “Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride

and the insolence of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle.”

And David said, “What have I done now? Is there not a cause?”

A giant needs to be defeated, and everyone else is cowering before him. David comes on the scene, and what is inside him will not allow him to tolerate what others are tolerating. He wants to know what will be granted to the one who kills this giant and delivers Israel. When Eliab hears David's question, he is appalled. He accuses David of the tall poppy syndrome.

Eliab does not know who David really is. All he sees him as is his little brother. David, however, will not allow Eliab to subdue what is in him through his accusations. He stands up against them and first responds, “What have I done now?” In other words, “I am tired of you pressing me down. I am weary of allowing you to try to fashion me, and weary of your prejudice against me, trying to steal away my destiny and what I know is in me.”

David then utters the famous words, “Is there not a cause?” The word *cause* in the Hebrew is *dabar*. It can mean several different things, one of the ideas being, “Is there not a word?” David could have been saying, “Don't we have a word from God on this matter? Why are you just sitting around in fear, doing nothing? Let's rise up and move at the word of the Lord.” David was jealous for the word of the Lord over the Israelites as a nation. This giant was challenging it. The word used is that Goliath was *defying* the armies of Israel. *Defy* in the Hebrew means “to pull off by stripping.” Goliath, through his words, was stripping Israel of its faith and identity, and was bringing shame. David came on the scene and stood up to resist this.

Many times, there are forces in the unseen realm that attack our identity. They question who we really are and the destiny that is assigned to us. We must have the spirit of David, which will arise and challenge these voices. We must not cower before them, as the armies of Israel did. We must stand up out of the tall poppy syndrome and bring a victory for ourselves and even for others. We must contend for the word of God that is declaring the future He has for us. This is what David was doing, and what we must do as well. Each of us must have the sense of a prophetic destiny that comes from God. We must have some sense of an awareness of who we are as His workmanship. Then we must let that fashion us, and not the ideas of others or even the culture we are part of. This is somewhat like what Paul spoke of in Romans 12:1–2:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

We are not to allow this world and its system to form us. We must allow what God is saying about us as His workmanship to be that deciding factor. Through the renewing of our mind with the principles of God's Word, presence and ideas, we are shaped into the image of the One who created us. We begin to think of ourselves as He thinks of us. We do not think arrogantly or haughtily of ourselves, but neither do we think less of ourselves. We think according to the measure of faith that has been granted to us. Romans 12:3 tells us to think soberly, according to the measure of faith that has been given to us:

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Faith is something that helps determine the way we see ourselves. Sometimes we think faith is only about the way we see God. Faith, however, is also about how we see who we are when we are connected to God. According to the measure of faith given to us, we are able to see who we are in God. In other words, we believe what God says about us. We do not let the opinions of others shape us. We must gain our identity expressly from the Lord and His Word.

Jesus Himself had to do this. When He came to Nazareth, the people's view of Him was determined by who His family was. If Jesus had allowed it, the opinion of the people would have reduced Him down to who they perceived His family to be. Yet Jesus had an awareness of who He was from His heavenly Father. Mark 6:2–3 shows people becoming offended at Him because they wanted to diminish who He was:

And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" So they were offended at Him.

When people stand up and begin to refuse the labels, tags and brands others seek to place on them, those others will become offended. Those others want everyone simply to be

part of the crowd, and they rarely change or have an impact on anything. In fact, they really do not want to see change, and anyone who seeks to bring change can become their enemy. They are content with the status quo.

The problem is that God has put into the hearts of many “tall poppies” a spirit that cannot be content with this. They have a different spirit, as Caleb had. Caleb and Joshua were two of the twelve spies Moses sent to spy out the land. Ten came back with a bad report, while these two came back with a report full of faith and hope. Numbers 14:24 shows God confirming and blessing Caleb in particular because of the spirit and attitude within him: “But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.”

God promises to bring Caleb into the land of promise because he has a *different* spirit. Is there a *different* spirit in us today? Do we have something in us that sets us apart from the rest of the culture, which is satisfied just to be also-rans? Are we a people who desire to believe God for great things? Scripture says God loves to be identified with people who have these desires and this spirit:

And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Hebrews 11:15–16

God loves to be called these people’s God. He loves people who will not be satisfied and will not seek opportunity to

return to the comfortable. This different spirit within them stirs His heart toward them. I want to be this kind of person. I do not want to settle. I want to press in and push into the fullness of what I was made for. As someone once said, “Why would you seek to fit in when you were made to stand out?”

Labeled and Marked by Grace

I would call your attention to one more Scripture that identifies the kind of spirit the world has, which seeks to make us conform. First John 3:1–3 shows us that the world does not know who we are:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The apostle John clearly said *the world does not know us*. If the world does not know who we are, then why do we continually allow it to tell us who we are? Through the world's influence, others consistently seek to brand us, label us and mark us with who they want us to be. We must consistently push back against this.

Even the three Hebrew children who stood for their God in Babylon had to make sure they did *not* allow that system to tell them who they were (see Daniel 1:6–7). Their Hebrew names were Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, yet we know them by their Babylonian names of Shadrach, Meshach and

Abed-Nego. These were the names given to them in the land of their captivity. Why was this done? Their captors were seeking to fashion these young men's identities and cause them to think of themselves differently. That world system was seeking to tell them who they were.

The young men's three Hebrew names spoke of who God was in their lives. *Hananiah* in the Hebrew means "God has favored." *Misrael* means "Who is like God?" *Azariah* means "God has helped." By changing the names, their captors were seeking to erase from them an awareness of the God they served and therefore their God-ordained identity. These three, however, would not allow it. They stood and refused the label and tags they were given. They might not have been able to maintain their original names in their circumstances, but they did not have to allow the name changes to form their thinking.

Neither do we today. Despite all its efforts, the demonically inspired world system has no right to determine who we see ourselves to be. According to Scripture, we are the children of God. We carry His nature, character and identity. His love fashions us. The world does not have any concept of who we are. In fact, we ourselves do not even fully see who we are, but marked by grace, we are confident that we will be like Him before all is said and done. This hope and desire in us pushes us to purify ourselves constantly, as He is pure. We are breaking out of the image the world would make us into, and we are progressively moving into the image of the One who loves us deeply.

All of this is absolutely essential to bearing fruit. We cannot produce what we do not understand ourselves to be producers of. This is where grace comes in. The apostle Paul said he was what he was by the grace of God. First Corinthians

15:10 shows him boasting in the grace of God: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Notice that Paul attributes to grace what he has become. He also declares, however, that from this grace he labored more abundantly than anyone else. This means that grace to Paul was not a license to stop putting forth effort. In fact, grace was an empowerment for him to work more tirelessly than others. Grace does not give us license to be lazy or unmotivated. Grace will inspire us from within to give our lives to obtain all God has called us to be. Grace will push us forward and will not allow us to rest until we become all that is in the heart of God for us. We will get into this more, but suffice it to say here that we do not produce out of our own efforts. It is grace in us that drives us forth to become fruitful, and grace that produces the passion of God in us and through us.

Running the Race Set before Us

As I said in the beginning, we all desire to be fruitful. We want our lives to count. I am a big fan of the holiday classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*. George Bailey, played by Jimmy Stewart, finds himself in a devastating place where he becomes convinced that it would have been better for everyone, including himself, if he had never been born. He feels as if his life has been for no good reason. He has lived a frustrated and unfulfilled life because he thinks it should have gone another way. It takes heavenly intervention for him to come to the realization that he has a blessed life.

His life has, in fact, had an impact on countless others because he was alive. Without his life, others would have had completely different and worse lives. This can be true for us as well. When we surrender our lives to the Lordship of Jesus, He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. We must allow Him the right and privilege to take our lives into the path He has desired. Hebrews 12:1–2 gives us insight into this idea:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I want to point out that we have a *race that is set before us*. This means we may not have chosen the exact path we are on. There was a race chosen for us. In other words, there are things about the path we have been on that we might go back and change if we could, yet God wants and needs us on this course, just like George Bailey. We are to keep our eyes on Jesus and trust Him. We are to run with endurance this race set before us. This endurance comes from the grace of God in our lives. It is not self-produced. It is supernatural in nature.

I have always liked to run. I was never a fast sprinter in short races. I was not even the fastest in long races. What I could do, however, was run for a long time and run a long way. I have endurance. The way I run and keep on running when I want to stop is to set goals. I remember my high school coaches taking us out on deserted roads and having

us run back to the school. Many of the guys would catch rides in passing cars coming back toward the school. Before they would get close enough for the coaches to see them, they would get out of the cars and pretend to be out of breath from their “long run.”

I would not do this. I would run all the way back in. My personal goal was to make sure I did not walk any of the course, but to run the whole way. I always have enjoyed challenging myself. My competition has not been against others, but rather to best myself, when I can. As I would run, my body, muscles and lungs would be screaming for me to stop and walk. I would not allow it. Telephone poles lined the roadway, and I would look down the road and set the next telephone pole as my goal. I would tell myself, *You are going to run to this next telephone pole. You are going to keep this pace and not stop.* As I would reach that pole, I would then set the next pole as my new goal. By doing this, I would run all the way back to school without stopping.

I learned to set goals and not stop until I reached them. This was, and is, the key to my endurance. I discovered a grace that produced endurance in my life. When I did not think I could make it to that next pole, as I tried, a grace would come that empowered me. I discovered that I had more endurance than I thought because of a grace in my life. I found that what I thought I could not do, I actually could do when I tried. There was a grace that would manifest in my life that strengthened me to do what I naturally thought impossible.

Jesus experienced this as well. In Luke 22:41–44, we see Him battling and struggling in the Garden of Gethsemane with His own will and desires:

And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done." Then an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in agony, He prayed more earnestly. Then His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

As Jesus struggled to surrender to the will of the Father, He set His heart to obey. As this surrender came, an angel came with grace from heaven that empowered Him to pray even more earnestly and effectively, past human ability. His sweat dropping with blood speaks of the deep distress and stress Jesus felt. Even He was unable to face all of this in His own human strength. His power to accomplish the will of God came from a heavenly dimension as He sought to satisfy the passion of His Father. With endurance He ran His race, but only through heavenly empowerment and grace. We, too, must have this influence in our lives. Only then will we be able to produce the fruit we are called to produce and finish the course we have been given to run.

Overcoming with Grace

As we finish this chapter, I want to talk about five things that grace helps us overcome, that we might be fruitful. My ultimate purpose in this book is not to discuss theological ideas, as important as that might be. The reason for this book is to release an empowerment through God's grace to make us effective and fruitful. Here are five things that can prevent fruitfulness but grace can help us overcome: not being planted, not embracing the pruning process, a spirit

of barrenness, stagnation in our spiritual walk and a Jezebel spirit. Let's look at them one at a time, to better understand what they are and why we must overcome them. As you and I overcome by grace these five reasons for unfruitfulness, fruit will become the norm for our lives.

Overcoming not being planted

One thing a lack of fruit can be traced back to is *not being planted*. Psalm 1:1–3 tells us that those who bear fruit are planted:

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

Notice that a man's *planting* is in the law/Word of the Lord. If our lives are based on and in the Word of God and that Word is what rules our life, we will bear fruit. It is amazing how many people feel as though they can make up their own rules and follow their own agenda and still get the kind of life they want. It does not work that way. My wife, Mary, grew up in a military family. Her father was a career United States Air Force enlisted man. As a result of this, they lived on many military bases across the world during Mary's growing-up years. She tells the story of the enlisted men who would come to their house, looking for help and companionship in their hard times. Their lives would be in shambles because of the choices they had made. Even as

one who did not yet know the Lord, Mary looked at these people's choices and decided she did not want the life those choices had produced.

If a young girl can figure this out, surely people who have been in the atmosphere of the Church can. Yet I watch as people who have grown up in the Church cohabit with others outside marriage, indulge excessively in alcohol and abusive substances, use language a sailor would not use and make choices completely contrary to the Bible. They then are astonished when things begin to fall to pieces in their lives. Many times, they want someone to pray a prayer in a moment to fix what years of wrong choices have created. This is impossible. The only way to fix the problem is to repent and line our lives up with the Word of God. If we get our lives planted in His Word, we will bear fruit in our season, our leaf will not wither and whatever we do will prosper. This is the key to breaking unfruitfulness and having the life of impact we desire.

Overcoming not embracing the pruning process

A second thing that can cause unfruitfulness is *not embracing the pruning process*. Jesus said in John 15:1–2 that God is after maximum fruit. Even when we bear fruit, He prunes us that we might produce more: “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

We would think that if we are bearing fruit, this would be sufficient. This passage clearly tells us, however, that when we bear fruit, God desires more. This gives us some insight into the mind and thought process of the Lord. He presses

us to our ultimate and absolute potential. He does not want anything left on the table, so to speak. He wants every potential He placed in us realized. He brings this to reality by pruning that which is already bearing and producing fruit.

Pruning is a process whereby what is taking life, yet producing nothing worthwhile, is cut off. In other words, if a vine has a life flow moving in it, but it is not producing to its maximum capacity, a wise vinedresser will prune that vine. One of the purposes of pruning a grapevine is to reduce "shading." In other words, the leaves can become so many that the vine and shoots become covered and the sun cannot reach what is necessary. This causes smaller and less desirable grapes. Pruning cuts away the right amount of shoot growth so the vine can produce the best grapes.

God does the same thing with us. Anything that *shades* us and does not allow the influence of His grace to touch us must be removed. One thing that shades us is a reliance on our own strength and ability. Through God's pruning process, He removes the confidence we would have in our own strength and causes us to rely on Him. Paul spoke of this in several places. Philippians 3:3–9 gives us insight into how Paul lost and laid aside all confidence in his own righteousness and power, putting his entire trust in Jesus and who He is:

For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

Paul said if anybody ought to be able to have confidence in himself, it was he. Yet he realized that even in his greatest place of strength, it would never be enough. He had to lay it aside and put his entire confidence in Jesus and what He had done for him. Paul actually said he counted it loss. He said he was willing to lose everything for the treasure of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.

Losing confidence in our own abilities and strength can be a hard process to go through, yet it is necessary. Only in our weakness is the Lord's strength made perfect. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul alludes to the secret of living from weakness that releases new realms of grace: "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Jesus revealed to Paul this powerful principle that His strength is manifested powerfully in our weakest state. To get us to this state of "weakness" where we have no confidence in our own strength requires the pruning of the Lord. The shade we have had our confidence in has to be removed so that our only hope is in Jesus and His grace. We are then ready to be trusted with fruitfulness. The Lord actually did this with Gideon, instructing him to send home from among

the troops any men who were fearful before a battle. Doing this would remove those who would contaminate others with their fear. This is because fear is contagious. If you make room for it, it will completely consume you and even others around you. The other reason, however, was that the Lord did not want His people mistakenly believing they had won the victory because of their superior numbers. Judges 7:2–3 tells us,

And the LORD said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ Now therefore, proclaim in the hearing of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him turn and depart at once from Mount Gilead.’” And twenty-two thousand of the people returned, and ten thousand remained.

Before it was over, God had reduced the army down to three hundred. From these three hundred He defeated a much superior army. Everyone knew it was the Lord who had done it. God had to prune and strip Gideon and the army so that in their weakness, He could manifest His strength.

The Lord does the same thing with us. In a dream I had several years ago, the Lord appeared to me. In the beginning of the dream I was standing outside a cave. I could sense the Lord in the Spirit, but I did not *see* Him in the natural. I knew, however, that He had gone into the cave. I was very hungry for His presence and anointing, so I pursued Him into the cave. When I was just barely inside, Jesus’ face then appeared and two mantles were released. They floated to me, and I knew they were the mantles of the Spirit and of power. Paul spoke of them in 1 Corinthians 2:2–5:

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Notice that Paul was with the people in weakness, fear and trembling. In this state the power, glory and grace of God were made manifest and Paul demonstrated the Spirit and power. These were the mantles I received in my dream as I pursued Jesus and His face appeared to me. In my dream, Jesus then continued deeper into the cave. Even though I now had what I was originally pursuing Him for, I continued following after Him. As we got deeper into the cave, suddenly Jesus appeared in His full bodily capacity. I saw Him in His fullness. As I reached Him in my pursuit, I reached out and touched Him on His shoulder. When I made contact, He stopped, turned and looked over His shoulder at me. I then spoke to Him. I did not know what was going to come out of my mouth. What I heard myself say in this moment was, *What must I do to love You more?*

Looking at me, Jesus responded with one word: *Separation!*

The dream ended, and I woke up wondering what it had meant. I had an idea, but it would take me several years to fully understand. You must know that my wife and I had been blessed with a very fruitful ministry. We had raised and led the largest charismatic church in our city. I was on TV five days a week. We had a functioning Bible school that was training ministers and others. I had a large staff and in many ways had great influence in our city and region. When

the Lord said *Separation!* I felt He was asking me to lay all of that aside. He was pressing me to “separate” myself from all He had blessed me with and what was now my strength.

This is exactly what Mary and I did in the months following this encounter. I did not realize it then, but God was taking me through a Gideon place of pruning to reduce me down, that He might exalt me in due time. We did, in fact, walk through this place for several years. I believe God was proving me and seeing if I would allow Him to bring me into weakness, that His strength might be made manifest in me.

During this season, we transitioned from pastoring this very powerful church to having a traveling ministry. Even though I did not know it at the time, it was like starting over. Contacts had to be made, and networking had to occur so other people would get to know me. Establishing myself as one who could minister to the Body of Christ at large was essential. This took years to happen. I discovered that the kind of word I had spoken as a pastor to a local church was not sufficient for speaking to the Church at large. I had to dig deeper and develop a more apostolic and prophetic ministry that supplied to churches what the local ministry was unable to give. Otherwise, there would have been no need for my ministry.

Plus, we left a church where we were greatly loved and honored, and we stepped into a realm where we were unknown and even sometimes were suspect. Whereas we had previously enjoyed a strong network of relationships, we were now thrust into a place of isolation. We were *separated*, just as the Lord had spoken to me. In the midst of all this, God was dealing with us, pruning us and causing us to learn of Him in a new and significant way. At times this was painful,

scary and awkward, and it caused much questioning in us. In the midst of it all, however, we sought to keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (see Hebrews 12:2). He was faithful to navigate us through this time, into our present state and function in life and ministry.

I believe this is what God does to His choicest vessels. This is what He did to the apostle Paul—not that I consider myself a Paul. I just know, as many people do, the pain and struggle of having a calling on our lives and the place of fear and uncertainty it can propel us into. Yet what abides in us is a sense and awareness that God is preparing us for His use, to have an impact on the world. When God sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus with a word in Acts 9:15–16, He told Ananias that Saul was a chosen vessel: “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.’” The Lord declared that Saul was His chosen vessel. As a result, Saul would be required to suffer. The suffering would not give the Lord some morbid enjoyment, but rather would reduce Paul down so that every confidence in the flesh would be removed. His only confidence would be in the power and grace of who Jesus is. Anyone the Lord uses significantly will be brought to a place of knowing it is all of grace. I must have everything I am living under—every shade—removed so that the only thing I am under and have confidence in is the Lord Himself. At this point, I am ready to bear fruit.

As Jesus spoke of the whole fruit-bearing process and the pruning God does, He made a statement we must come to realize is true. In John 15:5, He declared that we are incapable of producing what God desires without our strength

coming from Him: “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Jesus is letting it be known that only from a real union and connection with Him and His life will we bear fruit. The awareness that it is only by His grace is imperative to our bearing fruit and the Father being glorified.

Overcoming a spirit of barrenness

A third issue that can cause unfruitfulness is *a spirit of barrenness*. In 1 Samuel 1:10–11, Hannah is crying out for a son. She is tormented by her inability to conceive and bring forth a child. She is unfruitful:

And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.

Then she made a vow and said, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head.”

Out of her bitterness and pain, Hannah makes a vow to God. She promises that if He will give her a male child, she will give that child to the Lord and His purposes all his life. Eli, the high priest in those days, sees her as she prays and thinks she is drunk. Verses 14–18 chronicle the next part of this story. As she prays and her lips move without sound, Eli rebukes her, thinking she is a wicked woman:

So Eli said to her, “How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!”

But Hannah answered and said, “No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I have spoken until now.”

Then Eli answered and said, “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.”

And she said, “Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.” So the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

Recognizing his mistake, Eli declares a blessing over Hannah and her request. Notice what happens. She gets up, goes her way, eats and is no longer sad. The moment Eli as high priest blesses her and declares her request granted, this whole spirit of barrenness comes off her. This is why she is sad no longer. What had been controlling her is now broken. The result of this time is that she and her husband are intimate and she conceives because the spirit of barrenness has now been lifted from her.

To see fruitfulness come through our lives, we must deal at times with this spirit of barrenness. The devil will seek to use it to keep us from bearing fruit and advancing the Kingdom of God. As Hannah’s request was granted, her desire for a child was met. God also had His need met.

Allow me to take a moment to explain what I mean by God having a need. We would agree that God is the all-sufficient One who has no needs. Yet God has a plan and purpose He desires to see fulfilled in the earth. In Revelation 10:7, this plan, this work of redeeming all things back to Himself, is called *the mystery of God*: “But in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound,

the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets.” The complete work of redemption, the completion of this *mystery of God*, requires much activity on the part of God's people as He reclaims the nations to Himself. Part of this redemption process is having ministry gifts in operation that influence the Church, which in turn influences the culture.

In Samuel's day, God needed the prophet Samuel to be His voice in the nation of Israel. Otherwise, what God desired to occur in that time might have been postponed. So when I speak of God having a need, I am speaking of Him having whatever is needed to see His purpose done in the earth and see the *mystery of God* being brought to absolute fulfillment. God needed a prophet/priest in Hannah's time to reclaim the nation from the corrupted priesthood of Eli and his sons. This corrupted priesthood that Samuel grew up serving had not allowed the passion of God to be carried out. God's need was for a prophet in that time to shape the course of nations.

There are times God will allow us to walk through places of bitterness and barrenness to bring us to a place where we are willing to surrender all. This is what happened to Hannah. God allowed her to walk through such a place of barrenness that it formed in her a willingness to do the unthinkable—give up her firstborn son. When she came to this place, God then had His need met in Samuel, a prophet/priest who would manifest God's heart and turn a nation to Him.

When Hannah was willing to put the need of God above her own desires, her barrenness was broken. This is what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” When we place the *need* of God ahead of our own desires and seek His Kingdom first, *all* other things

are added to us. This is a reference to our needs being met and fulfilled. It is interesting that when we place God's need ahead of ours, our own cries are answered. This is exactly what happened to Hannah. Her barrenness was eradicated, and fruitfulness came. She even had three more sons and two daughters. First Samuel 2:21 shows the fruitfulness that was unlocked in and through Hannah because of her sacrifice: "And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile the child Samuel grew before the Lord." God had His prophet, who was growing up before Him, while Hannah received the family she so desperately craved. Her fruitlessness was replaced with abounding fruitfulness.

Overcoming stagnation in our spiritual walk

A fourth thing to deal with that can cause unfruitfulness is *stagnation in our spiritual walk*. Peter cautions about this in 2 Peter 1:5–8 and speaks of *adding* to our faith on a consistent basis:

But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We can begin our walk with the Lord by being fruitful. But if we are not careful and diligent, Peter said, we can become barren and unfruitful.

Jesus spoke of this as well. In Matthew 13, Jesus gives us the parable of the sower and the different soils his seed

fell in. Here is how He describes the soil filled with thorns and briars: “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (verse 22). Notice that the recipient *becomes unfruitful*. In other words, he was fruitful, but then became unfruitful. This is because there were thorns choking out what was being produced.

This is what Peter was declaring. We must not allow thorns in our hearts and lives to remove our fruitfulness. The best way to make sure of this is to be on the offensive in our faith. We are to diligently *add* some things to our walk with God. We are to be developing virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. If we do this, fruitfulness will take care of itself. We will be neither barren nor unfruitful. The thorns will be removed that want to choke out the fruit God desires us to bear.

Overcoming the Jezebel spirit

The fifth and final thing I will mention that can cause unfruitfulness is *the Jezebel spirit*. Jezebel was a wicked woman who ruled Israel with her husband, Ahab. God has nothing good to say about her. She led Israel away from Him and into Baal worship. One of the things she did was castrate men and make them into eunuchs whom she surrounded herself with. She emasculated them, making them unable to reproduce. To be clear, although Jezebel's servants actually were castrated, I am not talking about something a woman would do to a man. I am speaking of this *spirit* and what it does to God's people, both men and women. What happened to those servants in the physical is in essence what can happen

to people in the spiritual, and it causes unfruitfulness. Jesus spoke against this spirit in Revelation 2:20–23:

Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

This spirit, spoken of as *that woman Jezebel* in this Scripture, will create unfruitfulness if its influence is allowed into our lives. To be clear, I believe that what Jesus is speaking of in this passage as a *woman* is a demonic spiritual force. It is the *same* spirit that drove the original Jezebel in the days of Ahab. Notice please that it must not be allowed. Sometimes out of fear of confrontation, or through intimidation, people do not deal with this spirit, and Jezebel flourishes where weakness in people is perceived. Yet if people stand up in authority, Jezebel will not have a place to operate.

There must be boldness when dealing with this spirit. One of its main characteristics is control. Through manipulation, intimidation and domination, this spirit will bring people into submission. It will remove their creativity and allow them to do only what pleases it. We actually see this spirit in operation in 3 John 1:9–10:

I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if

I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

Diotrephes was a man under the influence of this Jezebel spirit. He loved preeminence. He would not receive apostolic authority. He put anyone out of the church who did not agree with him or submit to him. This is consistent with the Jezebel spirit of control. It subdues anyone who will allow himself or herself to be subdued. The results are many, with one of them being fruitlessness.

Remember, this spirit emasculates people and removes from them the ability to reproduce. This is why, when the Old Testament's Jezebel was finally thrown down and destroyed, the ones willing to do it were those whom she had made eunuchs. Second Kings 9:30–33 shows Jehu on assignment from God to rid Israel of idol worship. He tells Jezebel's eunuchs to throw her down:

Now when Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put paint on her eyes and adorned her head, and looked through a window. Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?"

And he looked up at the window, and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" So two or three eunuchs looked out at him. Then he said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot.

These eunuchs, who had had their ability to reproduce removed, got their revenge. They were instruments of God's justice against Jezebel and the spirit that drove her. They *threw* her down.

To rid yourself of its influence, you have to throw this spirit down. The Jezebel spirit's desire is to sit in a place of authority and influence. It will manipulate its way into these places. If it has been able to do this, it must be thrown down and removed from the place it occupies. Perhaps you gave it a place in your life through a person. As hard as it might seem, you must put this thing in its place. You have to throw it down, or you will never be free to be you and be fruitful.

Entire structures will lose their God-ordained purpose if Jezebel is allowed to rule and have influence. Once Jezebel is dealt with, however, God will even restore "eunuchs" to a place of fruitfulness. Isaiah 56:3–5 makes such a promise to eunuchs who consider themselves fruitless:

Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people"; nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree." For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

When I speak of eunuchs, I am not speaking of something natural, but rather of people who feel destined to be unproductive. God tells these people not to say, "Here I am, a dry tree." In other words, do not say, "I'm fruitless and barren." The Lord promises to give them a place in His house better than that of sons and daughters. He also promises to give them an everlasting name. This means a lineage and heritage that will carry their name and cause them to be

remembered. The Lord is promising to make the eunuchs fruitful.

In instructing eunuchs not to say they were a *dry tree*, God was proclaiming that they should not let their frustration over barrenness rule them. This is the way many people feel. They have a sense of the desire to be fruitful, yet they seem only frustrated. God is declaring, *I will release grace to you that will undo the Jezebel spirit that has sentenced you to fruitlessness. I will give you an everlasting heritage. Your destiny will not be one of barrenness, but one of productivity.*

Grace Empowers Fruitfulness

In the next chapters, we will discover how grace empowers us to be fruitful. Colossians 1:5–6 shows us the connection between grace and bearing fruit. Paul was telling the Colossian Church that he gave thanks and prayed for them “because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.”

Notice that *knowing the grace of God in truth* causes fruit to be born. It does this in all the world. This means whatever culture we might be in, it is the grace of God that empowers us to be fruitful. Fruitfulness is not the result of our superior wisdom or greater ability. Bearing fruit is the result of knowing the grace of God in truth.

In other words, when we have firsthand experience of God's grace and its effect on our lives, the result is the empowering of God that allows us to produce fruit. Frustration

is lifted, inadequacy is removed and we begin to live the life of purpose we always knew we were meant for. So let's not just learn ideas about grace. Let's allow the Spirit of grace Himself, the Holy Spirit, to impart God's graciousness into our lives. Then we will become fruitful and fulfill the destiny of God for our future.